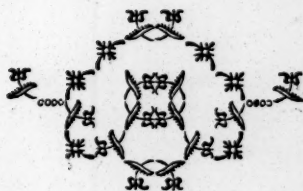


1609/3527.

A SEASONABLE
ADDRESS
TO THE
PEOPLE
OF
LONDON and MIDDLESEX,

Upon the present critical Situation of
Publick Affairs.



L O N D O N,

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the Strand. 1770.



A S E A S O N A B L E

ADDRESS, &c.

My Fellow Citizens, Countrymen, and Friends,

HAVING, with many others,
been solicited to sign a petition,
praying that the King would be pleased
to dissolve the parliament, I have refused
to sign any such petition, and in this
address cannot disguise my sentiments
for a moment, not even to gain your

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favour, or to procure your attention; I only pray that God may so regard me in my extreme need, as I now regard your good in this matter.

I should be glad that parliaments were made triennial, or even annual, but I cannot desire that the honour of parliament should be sacrificed to the spleen of discarded courtiers, who mean only to distress government until they, or their friends, are taken into place: nor can I wish to sacrifice the honour of parliament to the apprehensions of a few, who, for aught I know, are sincere in alledging, that our liberties are in danger.

Our liberties have been in danger formerly, when parliaments were dissolved



solved upon every trifling offence taken by the court. They would be in danger again, if parliaments were to be dissolved upon every clamour raised among the people.

I am ready to own that our liberties are in danger ; but from whom ? From the King, Lords, and Commons, or from the riots and tumults that have been excited in opposition to law and order ?

The freedom of election, we are told, has been invaded in the case of Middlesex : but I deny the whole charge. The county of Middlesex has been supported in all the freedom of election that our happy constitution bestows on any county or borough within the kingdom. A writ was issued ; every free-

holder that offered to poll was admitted : a return was made : a petition, founded on the disqualification of the person returned, was presented to the house. This disqualification could not be denied ; for it had been already declared by the house. The petition was accordingly granted, and the person who being qualified had the greatest number of votes, was allowed to take his seat. This has been the law, and the practice of parliaments from time immemorial, wherever the qualification, or legal forfeiture of the person returned, and not the number of his votes, were in question.

The House of Commons, or the majority of the representatives of the people, are, by the constitution, the supreme judges in every question relating

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to their own privileges, to the qualifications of their members, and to the right of elections. If it were otherwise, the people of England would soon lose all the share they have in the government of their country: for whoever is the supreme judge of elections is master of the commons, and might direct their power, or suppress it at pleasure. It is evident, therefore, that no one should be master of the Commons, but the Commons themselves.

We have reason to apprehend, that a particular county or borough may, upon occasion, be prevailed on to elect a very improper representative: but it is not likely that the majority of the whole representatives of the people will consist of improper persons: and it is wisely ordered by our constitution that the error

ror or folly of a part may be checked or corrected by the whole.

I will not pretend to say that any county or borough is capable of electing a peer, a clergyman, or an alien : tho' I am persuaded that there are persons enough of these denominations that would endeavour to be returned, if they did not know that the house would reject them. But we know that a county may chuse a person of very mean, not to say infamous, character : a person condemned, outlawed, and in prison : a person who ought to have lost his ears, not for libelling his King, whom his calumnies could not reach ; not for his vile ribaldry, which people have rendered important by calling it blasphemy ; but for a crime which possibly our silly prejudices have admitted as a merit, the
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crime of calumniating one part of this united kingdom to the other. This, I say, may possibly be his merit, and if it be not, I perceive no other.

Mr. Wilkes, who has been so often returned from the county of Middlesex, and as often expelled, and declared unworthy of a seat in parliament, has been, in every debate relating to his election, formally disowned, contemned, and vilified, by those who espoused the cause; while they adopted his argument they were ashamed of his person; and the question was, merely whether a county might not send into parliament, contrary to an express resolution of the Commons of Great Britain, any person, however unworthy, whom they had once been unfortunate enough to name.

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Are not the people of every county to chuse whom they please? No; they are not to chuse whom the law of parliament has rejected. I have consulted many lawyers on this point, and there is not one of them who does not know, that although resolutions of the Commons are not laws in any other matter, that, nevertheless, they are law in matters of privilege and election. If it were not so, we must suppose a right of appeal from the Commons to some other tribunal, and the Commons could not defend themselves against that supposed tribunal for an hour.

Are we, therefore, totally at the mercy of the House of Commons? Yes: in all matters of parliamentary privilege and right of election, as we are at the mercy of juries in all matters of criminal accusation

sation or civil right. And this is the happiness of our constitution; that we depend for our political and our civil rights, not on the King, his ministers, or judges, but on the representatives of the people, whose interests and whose rights are embarked on the same bottom with our own: and on juries of our peers or fellow citizens, whom we may even reject, if we have any cause of suspicion, and whose general interest it is to guard the innocent, and to punish the guilty. If any one can contrive greater securities to liberty than these, he must have a wiser head than all the statesmen that have hitherto existed in the world.

The Commons, it is true, may err, and so may juries; but we are nevertheless, upon the whole, safe in their
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hands; and if not safe in theirs, we cannot be safe in any other.

The Romans, whom we are in some things proud to resemble, thought that the rolls of the senate, and even of the people, were safe in the hands of single men. They granted full powers to expel from the senate, and to degrade from among the people, every person that was found unworthy of either. Shall we have less confidence in the Commons of Great Britain, than they had in single men?

What if the Commons should expel every member who has a regard to the rights of the people? the answer is, that the Commons on this supposition, would destroy themselves. And the rights of the Commons would be in-

vaded by the Commons. And it may be asked as well, what would become of a man who should kill himself? We must answer that he would die. But no folly can exceed that of neglecting dangers that may occur in every hour, to guard against mere suppositions that are contrary to the ordinary course of things.

But I shall for a moment suppose in my turn, that the Commons forgot their trust, declined the exercise of their judgment, and allowed any county or borough, to send into parliament any unworthy or profligate person, whom the faction of the times might recommend. Would not this be a most noble accession of liberty you had gained: the liberty of playing the fool, the liberty of betraying your own interest,

and the liberty of imposing on your country, in the capacity of legislator, a person whom you would not trust with five pounds worth of your goods. You will be pleased to consider, my Fellow Citizens of Middlesex and London, that in chusing members of parliament, you elect legislators not for yourselves only, but likewise for your country. And that the law both of God and man will authorize your countrymen, acting by themajority of their representatives in parliament, to defend themselves against any act of indiscretion or folly on your part. If you complain of this as an invasion of your liberties, so may a robber on thehighway complain, that he is hindered from seizing the property of his fellow subjects.

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In the name of common sense, and of common decency, do you think that liberty consists in a licence to do wrong? Or if this were the description of liberty, would you think it a blessing? I shall not pretend to tell you what liberty is: but this I know, that the best thing which can happen to any person whatever, is to be protected in doing right, and to be hindered from doing wrong. This is the treatment of every affectionate parent to his child; and this is the treatment which our constitution has so long procured to the people of England, a people who not long since, might well be reckoned the noblest and the happiest on earth. I shall leave you to show that you have not forfeited the character of your ancestors. But I am sorry to observe that notions of liberty are now adopted, which tend
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not only to detract from this character, but may ere long lead to the commission and to the suffering of every crime.

I shall be told, however, that my arguments prove what is not denied. That the House of Commons had a right to reject Mr. Wilkes: But not to admit Mr. Lutterel. Whoever maintains this assertion, must be determined to mislead you, or be himself strangely ignorant of the custom or law of parliament. It is the law of parliament not only to reject disqualified candidates, whatever number of votes they may have, and to consider every person voting for such candidates, as not present at the election, or not voting at all; but likewise to admit candidates, who (being qualified) have the greatest number of votes. If a candidate of the
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first description should be returned, the second is notwithstanding allowed to take his seat.

In this, our constitution has wisely provided against anarchy and confusion among the people, as well as against encroachments on the rights of the Commons. It is the spirit of our constitution, that every fair election at which a qualified person has votes, should be final. If it were otherwise, and if candidates were always to be thrown back on the boroughs or counties for a decision of the difficulties that occurred on the merits of a return or election, it may easily be imagined what disorders would follow among parties exasperated by repeated contention ; among a people corrupted by continued idleness and debauchery, and amidst that remission of
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police or of government which is natural in times of election, when every magistrate is disposed to flatter, not to restrain the people.

When I consider how much these apprehensions were verified in the case of Middlesex, I am indeed surprized that any person whatever should blame the very cautious, but I hope very steady and unalterable conduct of the Commons.

Mr. Wilkes at first had his competitors in the county of Middlesex. Being elected and expelled, he returned with the new writ. The competitor was maltreated, driven, or terrified from the field. Mr. Wilkes alone had any votes. He was returned, and expelled, no matter how often. A farce was now acting,

acting, at which the enemies of England were diverted. The parliament of Great Britain was to be wholly taken up about Mr. Wilkes, and this illustrious personage was to be bandied from the county to the parliament, and from the parliament to the county, without any hopes of an end to the plot. In the mean time, riot and tumult increased in disorder and frequency. The capital was in danger of being laid in ruins for not rejoicing sufficiently at the triumphs of Mr. Wilkes ; a wild ferocity was growing amidst the practice of continued disorders ; it was inflamed by debauchery, and among the lower people likely to rise to despair, the offspring of idleness and want. And yet there were citizens, I am told, who with their larders, cellars, pockets, shops, and coffers full, and with a great re-

gard to their property, still fomented these disorders, and counteracted the law and the magistrate, to whom they ought to have fled for protection.

In all this disorder the parliament remained unshaken, and while the safety of the state was at stake, adhered to its forms. What might have been the consequence is hard to determine, but the difficulty was removed at last : Mr. Lutterel had the courage to stand candidate for Middlesex, and to give the sober and well disposed among the freeholders of this county, an opportunity of sending another name to parliament besides that of Mr. Wilkes. He was threatened and attacked by the mob of London, not by the freeholders of Middlesex, who either with the true spirit of Englishmen, admired and respected

spected his courage, or had got their lesson and were taught that more violence would hurt their cause. Under these circumstances, 296 freeholders had the courage to come and vote for Mr. Lutterel; and the House of Commons found, that, being the only qualified candidate, he was agreeably to the laws of parliament entitled to take his seat. And there have been from that time forward at least, no more riots at Brentford.

It is strange, at such a crisis to hear any one ask, what were the precedents on which the parliament proceeded? and stranger still, that any one should be blind to the precedent of almost every controverted election. But I shall suppose that there was no precedent; God forbid that the Commons of Great Bri-

tain in a time of disorder and imminent ruin, should sit like pedants with their hands ~~across~~, waiting till a precedent was found, according to which they might save their country. The Roman senate sent for the accomplices of Cataline, and without form or precedent had them strangled in a dungeon. And yet the Roman senate was not to be trusted with discretionary powers in any degree comparably to the representatives of the people of England in parliament assembled.

I know that these disorders of last winter may be represented as the ebullitions of party, suitable enough to the nature of a constitution like ours: or as local commotions that have no general influence on the state. But a party that pretends to govern by force at the gates
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of the royal palace, and in the streets that lead to both houses of parliament may be suited to the state of Algiers or, Tunis, but not to the nature of any legal constitution whatever. Nor are disorders that tear up the seats of government, to be considered as local commotions that pass in a corner, and without any lasting consequence; they affect the whole community, and if not timely prevented may lead to fatal revolutions, and to the ruin of the state; for which we have no remedy but the prompt and decisive interpositions of parliament to suspend or to enforce the law.

It may indeed be wondered at, how such disorders could be repeated in the face of parliament, which is invested with all the authority of the law, and in the face of the King, who is armed with

with the whole executive powers of the state. My fellow citizens of London and Middlesex will not think it sedition to censure their superiors ; and I will make bold to say, that the reins of government have been held too loose, that the too frequent fluctuation of office has weakened its authority, has increased the number of discarded and of discontented courtiers, and the number of persons who hope that by distressing the government and putting the ministers to the rout, they may come in for a share of the spoil. It is high time that ministers should have a firm hold of their office while they continue to discharge the trust with resolution, ability, and integrity. And that others should be taught the road to preferment is not distressing the government and misleading the public.

A few unhappy people, and I hope but a few, are unwarily led into a fatal error, that every insult upon government is to pass unpunished; and begin to entertain a presumption, which if not timeously checked may lead them into circumstances (which God avert) circumstances in which it will be necessary that either they or the state should perish. But I hope that either the alternative will never be put, or if it should that we shall be enabled yet long to maintain that happy constitution from which the King as well as the people derive their security.

My fellow citizens of London and Middlesex, how can you be imposed upon by a few obscure and impudent persons, who meeting at a tavern, are pleased to call themselves, *Supporters of*
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the Bill of Rights. From whom are your rights in danger, but from such persons and their accomplices? Are your rights in danger from every legal authority in the kingdom, and are they to be defended by John Wilkes, Esq. from his chambers in the King's Bench prison? Are they unsafe in the hands of parliament, and safe in the hands of Delaval, Townshend, Sawbridge, and Parson Horne? In the name of common sense, if you have a mind to sport awhile with any matter of novelty, get an Elizabeth Canning, or a Cock Lane ghost, do not profane the Bill of Rights: do not turn your supposed liberty into disorder and folly: to give people of sober dispositions a distaste to the name of liberty, and to all the world a very just aversion to the use you make of it.

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Are you disposed seriously to believe that you have a right to send into parliament any person under sentence of the law, and actually in jail for his misdemeanors? If so, I hope that this privilege is confined to the county of Middlesex: for I can conceive nothing more ridiculous than the use of it, extended over the kingdom, and a roll of parliament actually filled with persons laid up in different prisons.

I must again repeat what I already mentioned; that your choice of a member of parliament does not, like your choice of a local magistrate, concern yourselves alone. You chuse a Mayor, an Alderman, or Sheriff only for yourselves, and are accountable to no one else: but you chuse a member of par-

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liament to act as legislator for the whole kingdom, and are accountable to your country : and I cannot help admiring the conduct of those counties and boroughs who now interpose with petitions and clamours that you may be allowed to chuse a person who is in jail for his crimes.

The city of London may elect what magistrates they please ; they may entrust the keeping of the peace to persons who have done all they can to break the peace ; they may chuse a magistrate whose public appearances were always ridiculous, till now that they begin to render the nation ridiculous. They may even chuse to entrust the public order to a person who is himself under the sentence of the law for disorders committed.

mitted. All this regards only the city of London: it is their own affair; they have sown, and let them reap: but I hope in God that the rest of the kingdom are to have no share in the fruits.

If this parliament be dissolved for rejecting Mr. Wilkes, another may be dissolved for reprimanding Mr. Beckford next time he is pleased to assert a dispensing power in the crown: and if parliament is to be dissolved at the request of a few counties and boroughs, there is reason to believe that such requests will multiply apace; for a time of general election is a time of pleasure and of personal consequence to many of our supposed petitioners.

There is one part of the subject which I am sorry has occurred so often ; it is the part of those who create the disturbances we have lately experienced, in order to force themselves into power. Such persons, so long as the public was silly enough to believe they had any regard to their country, were used to call themselves Patriots. But now they feel the ridicule of being called Patriots, and take the name of Opposition, which is modest and just enough. For there is not an example of their proposing any thing for the good of the people, they only oppose what others intend to do : so much that if an enemy were landed on your coast, they would oppose whatever was proposed for your defence ; and imagine, if they can discredit a minister by public misfortunes, he must be removed,

removed, to make way for themselves. Thus the merit upon which they claim the confidence of King or people is doing all the mischief they can to both. I have often wondered how people of distinction and reputation, and who have a great interest in the preservation of their country, could submit to act so childish, not to say so wicked a part.

But I must conclude, my fellow citizens, countrymen, and friends, exhorting you to rouse yourselves from this dream of wild apprehension and jealousy, to recollect in what security you have enjoyed your rights; to pray to God that he would preserve the state as it is, for it is now at the height of prosperity and freedom; that he would fortify the government with wisdom and resolution

to repress intestine disorders, and shut the doors of public employment and office for ever against those who would burst them open by means so ruinous to their country ; and who, whilst all men of sober sense are alarmed at the prospect before them, are, nevertheless, preparing to grope for money, preferments, and honours in the blood of their country.



F I N I S.

